

Stewardship Notes

Indiana Division of Forestry



Classified Forest Program

A Classified Forest is an area of at least 10.0 contiguous forested acres where the landowner has agreed (by application) to maintain the forest and be a good steward of the land. In return, the State of Indiana agrees to see that the assessed value of the land is reduced to \$1 per acre, and taxes are then paid on that assessment. The woodlands are managed for timber production and the protection of watersheds, while conserving other forest resources and values.

Eligible woodlands may be either native forests containing at least 40 square feet of basal area per acre or at least 1,000 timber producing trees (any size) per acre. Tree plantations with at least 300 well-established timber producing trees are also eligible to be a Classified Forest.

Certain activities cannot take place on Classified Forest lands:

- Grazing by domestic livestock
- Building of houses, sheds, etc.
- Intentional burning unless prescribed under a written management plan
- Growing Christmas trees

Other activities are allowed, and are encouraged when appropriate to meet the landowner's goals and objectives for the land. These activities, however, must not be conducted in a manner, which is detrimental to the health and productivity of the forest or its watershed.

- Maintenance of access roads and trails
- Timber harvesting
- Firewood cutting
- Horseback riding
- Hiking
- Hunting
- Wildlife management

PRIMARY BENEFITS TO THE CLASSIFIED FOREST OWNER

- reduced property taxes
- regular forest inspection by a professional forester
- annual newsletter and forestry literature

Stewardship Notes

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HOW TO ENTER THE PROGRAM

Contact your district forester to let him/her know you are interested in putting your forest into Classification. An initial inspection of your woods will be done to determine whether it meets the eligibility requirements. A written management plan, which may be prepared by the district forester or by a consulting forester, is required prior to application. This plan puts into writing your goals for the woodland, and prescribes how to reach those goals over the next 5-10 years. This plan is flexible, and may change as your objectives change and/or the woodlands develop over time. The prescription(s) will always take into account the health and productivity of the woods as activities are done to reach your goals.

The actual Classified Forest application must be taken to a registered land surveyor, who will write an exact description of the area being Classified. This can usually be done by providing an aerial photograph and a copy of your deed to the surveyor. The cost may vary according to the complexity of the survey and the surveyor. You will also need to sign the application and have it notarized. The county assessor must also sign the application, along with the State Forester. Once these signatures have been completed, the document must be recorded in the county courthouse where the land is located.

REINSPECTIONS

At least once every five years, the District Forester or a representative will be out to look over your Classified Forest (at no cost). You are encouraged to go along on these reinspections to ask questions of the forester and to discuss your goals for the woodlands. The forester will look at the woods to see how it is progressing, to be sure there are no violations occurring, and to help you update your management plan. A written report will be provided to you after the reinspection. You are also required to fill out and return an annual report that is used by the District Forester to keep up-to-date records of your woods.

POSTING YOUR LAND

The District Forester will provide signs to you (at no cost) which you must post around your Classified Forest. The signs clearly state that the area is **private property** and a Classified Forest. By placing your woodlands in the program, you are not giving up your private property rights, and no one may trespass on your land. The Classified Forest designation does not open your land to public hunting.

SELLING OR TRANSFERRING THE LAND

Whenever the Classified land is transferred to a new owner either through outright sale, inheritance, or gift, the Classified status remains with the land unless the new owner does not wish to participate in the program. The same benefits and responsibilities are transferred to the new owner. You must notify the District Forester when the land changes hands. If the land is withdrawn from Classification (voluntarily or

Stewardship Notes

Indiana Division of Forestry

involuntarily), the back taxes (up to 10 years), plus a 10%/year interest penalty, must be paid to the county. If not, it is considered a lien against the property and it is treated in the same manner that delinquent taxes on real property are treated.

